

THE SUPREME COURT OF MONTANA

KARLA M. GRAY
CHIEF JUSTICE

215 NORTH SANDERS
P.O. BOX 203001
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-3001



TELEPHONE (406) 444-5490
E-MAIL kgray@state.mt.us
FAX (406) 444-3274

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Dear Members of the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Long Range Planning and
Members of the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government and
Transportation:

Since I can't be with you today, I write to respectfully request your strong support for the Judicial Branch's projects contained in HB 14. This funding is critical to the efficient operation of our courts in meeting the needs of Montanans who use our judicial system to solve their legal disputes.

These proposals may sound familiar to you. In 2005, the Judicial Branch requested HB 752, to fund certain essential court technology improvements through a bonding initiative. HB 752 received a majority vote, but not the two-thirds necessary for transmittal to the Senate. The Judicial Branch proposals in HB 752 (2005) and HB 14 (2007) focus on two important areas of court technology – records management and courtroom technology.

In the area of records management, the Judicial Branch proposes a combination of enterprise licensing of its flagship case management system, coupled with a state standard document management system. We also need a system to enable the electronic filing of cases with Montana courts, with its attendant efficiencies to judges and ready public access to judicial records.

In the area of courtroom technology, the Judicial Branch requests funds to maintain the very successful judicial video network and to expand the network where it is cost effective to do so. The Judicial Branch also proposes a courtroom-by-courtroom technology assessment followed by actual improvements to address the most pressing courtroom technology needs, including improved sound systems, evidence display systems, and improved recording of court proceedings.

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This legislation will allow the Judicial Branch to aggressively deploy appropriate technologies throughout the court system. Each proposal is based on state information technology standards and uses State of Montana enterprise information technology solutions where applicable. Where no enterprise solution exists, the Judicial Branch has priced industry standard, commercial off-the-shelf products to minimize the risks associated with in-house or custom development. I'm sure you'll recognize that these proposals are in keeping with the spirit of the Montana Information Technology Act, while at the same time meeting the unique needs of the Judicial Branch. Please note that no part of these proposals duplicates any IT proposal already approved by the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government and Transportation.

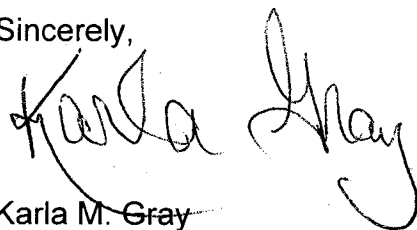
HB 14's inclusion of the Judicial Branch's information technology initiatives is critical to our Branch. From a broader perspective, HB 14 is important because it is the first bill that truly embraces the principles of the Montana Information Technology Act--an act emanating from the 2001 Legislature as SB 131, sponsored by Senator Mike Taylor, and enacted with near unanimous approval. One of the critical goals of the Act is the implementation and management of similar information technology systems and data management applications in a coordinated manner to minimize unwarranted duplication. The Judicial Branch's proposals are designed to finally achieve this goal.

In response to the Montana Information Technology Act, the Supreme Court adopted State information technology standards early and formed a Commission on Technology. The Commission on Technology--with representatives from every level of court and judicial office, the Legislature, the State Bar, and the public--adopted the Judicial Branch's first information technology strategic plan in 2003. The Judicial Branch proposals before you are the culmination of the extraordinary planning efforts of the Commission on Technology between 2002 and 2006 and our efforts throughout the Branch in recent years.

In closing, I want to thank Representative Wiseman for his sponsorship of HB 14 and the Governor's Office of Budget and Program Planning for inviting the Judicial Branch, after a merit review of the Branch's proposals, to participate in this legislation.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of the Judicial Branch's information technology funding requests in HB 14. I urge your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karla Gray", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Karla M. Gray
Chief Justice